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Monitoring of the implementation of the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities

Note by the Secretary-General

1. At its forty-eighth session, the General Assembly adopted the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities, contained in the annex to its resolution 48/96. These 22 Standard Rules provide a framework to further implement the goals of "equality" and "full participation" of disabled persons in social life and development as set forth in the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons, adopted by the Assembly in its resolution 37/52.

2. In section IV, paragraph 2, of the Standard Rules, it was stipulated that the rules should be monitored within the framework of the sessions of the Commission for Social Development. The appointment of a Special Rapporteur to monitor their implementation was also envisaged in that paragraph.

3. In March 1994, the Secretary-General appointed Bengt Lindqvist (Sweden) Special Rapporteur on Disability of the Commission. Mr. Lindqvist prepared three reports (A/52/56, E/CN.2000/3 and Corr.1 and E/CN.2002/4), for the consideration of the Commission during his mandate, which was renewed in 1997 and in 2000 by the Economic and Social Council in its resolutions 1997/19 and 2000/10, respectively.

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4. In June 2003, the Secretary-General appointed Sheikha Hessa Al-Thani (Qatar) Special Rapporteur for the period 2003-2005. The Special Rapporteur submitted an oral report to the Commission at its forty-second session. At its forty-third and forty-fourth sessions, in 2005 and 2006, the Commission considered the reports of the Special Rapporteur on the monitoring of the implementation of the Standard Rules (E/CN.5/2005/5 and E/CN.5/2006/4, respectively). By its resolution 2005/9, the Economic and Social Council welcomed the work of the Special Rapporteur, decided to renew her mandate through 31 December 2008 and requested the Special Rapporteur to submit to the Commission an annual report on the monitoring of the implementation of the Standard Rules. The Secretary-General has the honour to submit to the Commission the annual report of the Special Rapporteur pursuant to that resolution.

Report of the Special Rapporteur on Disability of the Commission for Social Development on monitoring of the implementation of the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities

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I. Introduction

1. I am honoured to present my fourth report to the Commission for Social Development on my activities in monitoring of the implementation by the Government of the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (General Assembly resolution 48/96, annex).

2. The past year has been characterized by a number of important achievements for the disability movement. Since my previous presentation to the Commission, the text of a new human rights instrument has been finalized — the international convention of the rights of persons with disabilities. It has been a privilege to be part of that process and to witness the triumph of persons with disabilities, their representatives, human rights and international law experts, who have all advocated for so long and worked so hard to make the convention a reality.

II. Involvement in the convention process

3. Over the past four years I have attended all the sessions of the Ad Hoc Committee on a Comprehensive and Integral International Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities held since my appointment as Special Rapporteur and have contributed to the long and intensive process of drafting the convention. I have concentrated my efforts on listening to organizations of persons with disabilities and talking to government representatives. My goal has been to work effectively to ensure that the best interests and rights of persons with disabilities are duly taken into consideration.

4. Within the context of the process of negotiation of the convention, my efforts have been focused in particular on promoting the inclusion of an article on women with disabilities, having seen first hand the double and triple discrimination that women with disabilities suffer even in the most developed communities.

5. I have also expressed my support for a strong article on international cooperation. In my view, international cooperation is not simply about the rich countries giving to the poor. The process should be about sharing and exchange of experience, expertise, good practices and in-kind contributions, as well as financial aid. For I can attest, from first-hand familiarity with some of the poorest countries, that there are practices of equalization of opportunities that many industrialized countries can learn from.

6. Additionally, as the Special Rapporteur mandated to monitor government actions in implementation of the Standard Rules, I was very interested in ensuring the inclusion of effective provisions for monitoring in the draft convention. In my opinion, a strong article on monitoring further ensures that the Convention will find its rightful place among the United Nations conventions and treaties related to human rights.

7. To that end, I convened a meeting in Doha in June 2006, attended by over 25 experts on human rights, disability and international law. The outcome of the meeting was a comprehensive monitoring proposal, which was submitted to the Chairman of the Ad Hoc Committee prior to its last session, in August 2006.

8. After the eighth session of the Ad Hoc Committee, I continued my advocacy work related to the convention. Speaking before the General Assembly in September

2006, I urged Governments to sign, ratify and adopt the convention and to ensure its implementation.

9. I have also taken up the cause of persuading Governments to delete the footnote that was added to article 12 (Legal capacity) of the draft convention at the eighth session of the Ad Hoc Committee, which, in my opinion and in that of many experts on disability and human rights, would deprive persons with disabilities in many countries of their ability to act upon the rights granted to them by the convention.

10. In that context, I met with representatives of States that supported the footnote, wrote letters to ministers of social affairs and social development in those countries and used all the influences at my disposal as Special Rapporteur on Disability.

11. I would like to point out to the distinguished members of the Commission the symbiotic relationship that exists between the Standard Rules and the convention. The convention's coming into existence as a human rights instrument will not detract from the importance of the Standard Rules.

12. The articles of the convention mirror the rules in the Standard Rules in content and substance, dealing with the same issues that are important to the lives of persons with disabilities. The Standard Rules serve as a detailed checklist on what needs to be done and how it should be approached in order to ensure that the rights enshrined in the convention are safeguarded. Experience from the implementation work on both the Standard Rules and other human rights instruments has shown that, while we may as an international community agree on international legal standards for the rights of different groups, we are still a long way from global implementation and realization of those rights.

13. A comparative look at the rules contained in the Standard Rules and the articles of the convention reveal a match almost article for rule. In comparison with the convention, the Standard Rules offer more specific measures that allow for guidance in implementing the rights embodied in the convention. In this sense, the Standard Rules will remain the guiding principles in the implementation of rights and an effective instrument to change the lives of persons with disabilities.

14. The Standard Rules place a moral and policy obligation on the international community towards persons with disabilities, while the convention carries with it a legal commitment. Using both instruments will allow us to work more coherently to improve the lives of persons with disabilities in the world.

III. Monitoring the implementation of the Standard Rules

A. Monitoring: the global survey

15. The past year was also a landmark year with regard to monitoring of the implementation of the Standard Rules. My office, along with the South-North

Centre for Dialogue and Development,[1] has just concluded the second phase of the analysis of the results of the global survey on government action on the implementation of the Standard Rules.

16. This survey, which was administered, collated and analysed throughout 2005 and 2006, has yielded the most comprehensive data yet on the actions taken (or not taken) by Member States to put into practice the commitment they made to persons with disabilities when they unanimously signed and adopted the Standard Rules in 1993.

17. This is the first survey of its kind on the implementation of the Standard Rules and covers each of the rules, taking into account all the measures that need to be implemented in order to achieve the equalization of opportunities for persons with disabilities. The analysis of the survey dealt with 402 individual pieces of information from the 114 Member States that responded to the survey. Although the report on the survey can by no means be considered a definitive work on the situation of persons with disabilities worldwide, it nevertheless provides a general picture of the shortcomings and deficiencies in the implementation of the Standard Rules. It also gives directions on actions that need to be taken in order to achieve equalization of opportunities for persons with disabilities.

18. The objective of the survey was to assess to what extent Governments' commitment to the Standard Rules has resulted in actual implementation. The survey therefore sought to understand how commitment to each one of the rules had been translated into real action:

- Have policies been drafted?
- Have legislations been passed in order to translate the political will into a legal framework?
- Have these legislations been followed by programmes, which are the only ways to translate both the policies and legislations into change on the ground?

Attention was also given as to the specific provisions for implementation:

- Have financial resources been allocated?
- Have personnel been trained?
- Have persons with disabilities been included throughout the process?
- Have all types of disability been covered or taken into consideration?
- Have persons with disabilities from all socio-economic, religious and cultural backgrounds been reached?
- Has the gender aspect been taken into consideration in the delivery of services and programmes?

[1] The South-North Centre for Dialogue and Development is a non-profit, non-governmental organization based in Amman concerned with intercultural exchange and the exchange of ideas for the prevention and resolution of conflicts. The Centre has been a partner with the office of the Special Rapporteur in the translation and arabization of disability materials, making them culturally as well as linguistically relevant to the Arab region.

19. In addition, the survey also dealt with the provisions set forth in the proposed supplement to the Standard Rules.[2] Even though the supplement has not been adopted by the General Assembly, its proposed provisions are deserving of attention. The provisions in the supplement that the survey considered included women and children with disabilities, persons with psychosocial and intellectual disabilities, housing, health and medical care, adequate standard of living, poverty, access to social environment, communication and matters relating to families and caregivers of children and persons with disabilities.

20. My office received a 60 per cent return on the questionnaires sent out — an impressive sample from which to draw conclusions and paint a general picture of the situation of persons with disabilities. The lack of data from many countries, however, tells us that there is more work to be done in order to complete that picture.

21. Nevertheless, the survey has enabled me to formulate some specific recommendations, which I will share with you in due course, one of which will be that the work on the survey needs to be completed by gathering data from the 77 countries that have not yet responded to the questionnaire.

22. A comparative analysis of the responses received from Governments and organizations of persons with disabilities revealed a wide gap between Governments' perception of the situation of persons with disabilities and the perception of civil society in some countries. We will be looking further at these results in an attempt to understand the gap both in perception and in understanding of the situation and help countries in bridging it.

B. Findings of the global survey

23. A full report of the findings of the survey was published in January 2006 on the website of the Secretariat for the convention on the rights of persons with disabilities (E/CN.5/2006/4). I will briefly explore some of the most significant points as I see them.

24. On the positive side there were some surprising findings that revealed an unexpectedly high level of implementation on the Standard Rules pertaining to medical care and rehabilitation. On the negative side, however, there is as yet no full implementation of the Rules in today's world.

25. The cornerstones of implementation of the Standard Rules and the foundation of the preconditions necessary to achieve equalization is **awareness-raising**, which

[2] The proposed supplement was the result of an analysis of how implementation of the Standard Rules worldwide had had an impact on the lives of persons with disabilities. It was concluded that, though important progress had been made in many areas, the following specific topics had not received adequate attention and thus required further development: (a) fundamental concepts; (b) adequate standard of living and poverty alleviation; (c) housing, including the issue of residential institutions; (d) health and medical care; (e) emergency situations; (f) access to the social environment; (g) communication issues; (h) personnel training; (i) gender; (j) children with disabilities and the family; (k) violence and abuse; (l) older persons; (m) developmental and psychiatric disabilities; (n) invisible disabilities; and (o) suggested further initiatives in national policy and legislation. Further information can be found in the report of the Special Rapporteur of 9 January 2002 (E/CN.5/2002/4).

contributes to reshaping the environment, changing attitudes and modifying behaviours for both society at large and persons with disabilities themselves. **The findings of the survey reveal that many countries have reached an understanding of the importance of raising awareness.**

26. Having said that, I would however like to reiterate the purpose of rule 1, on awareness-raising, which calls upon States to raise awareness of the rights, needs, potential and abilities of persons with disabilities as a prerequisite to achieving equalization of opportunities. Without such awareness it is not possible for persons with disabilities to be equal participants in society. It is perhaps difficult to assess the level of awareness and knowledge of all the aspects required for participation in a society but the questionnaire asked about detailed measures taken by Governments in order to raise the level of awareness.[3]

27. Disappointingly, the survey revealed that only two thirds of the States that responded had taken one or more actions towards the implementation of awareness-raising measures. In many cases States had not even attempted to provide knowledge and information about the rights of persons with disabilities to persons with disabilities themselves. Additionally, 79 of the 114 countries had not used the most powerful awareness-raising tool available to them — the media.

28. Even where awareness-raising efforts were conducted, campaigns remained limited to attitudes and behaviour towards persons with disabilities without addressing the rights, potentials and contributions inherent in the concept of equalization.

29. On the other hand, there were some surprising findings with regard to rules 2, 3 and 4 relating to the provision of **medical care, rehabilitation and support services** to persons with disabilities. Responses revealed that more countries actually provided medical care, rehabilitation and support and assistive services, including assistive devices, than those which had adopted policies and enacted legislation for that purpose.

30. In my opinion, this may reveal an inherent sense of responsibility on the part of the social system to provide services necessary to the well-being of all. However, without the necessary policies and legislation, such services will remain in the domain of charity and will not be recognized as a right that will lead to equality and full participation. **There are still some 40 countries in the world today that have taken no measures at all to provide medical care and/or rehabilitation services to persons with disabilities.** If one was to consider the 77 countries that did not

[3] What action was taken by your Government to raise awareness about the rights, needs, potential and contributions of persons with disability?
( ) Adopting policies
( ) Passing legislation
( ) Adopting programmes
( ) Drafting guidelines to be used by the media
( ) Training personnel
( ) Disseminating materials in the form of brochures, bulletins, posters, etc.
( ) Introducing awareness-raising into the school curriculum
( ) Educating the public
( ) Consulting and cooperating with organizations of persons with disabilities
( ) Other (**specify**) _____

respond to the survey (of which half are developing countries), the figure might be significantly higher.

31. There were some disturbing findings with respect to **accessibility**. Almost 12 years after the adoption of the Standard Rules, 67 countries have not yet implemented any accessibility programmes. In 62 countries the outdoor environment remains inaccessible to persons with disabilities, in 75 there is no accessible transportation and in 71 countries there are no programmes in place to make information accessible to persons with disabilities, nor do Governments seem to be aware of the need on the part of persons with disabilities for accessible forms of communication in order to interact fully with their environment.

32. Since accessibility is a prerequisite for full participation, it is not surprising that persons with disabilities remain marginalized in many countries and in some cases totally invisible to the eyes of mainstream society. The fact that many States indicated that hospitals, rehabilitation and medical centres were the only fully accessible public spaces puts persons with disabilities in the category of service seekers rather than participants.

33. This is also surprising in view of the fact that 101 countries seem to have succeeded better in implementing measures with respect to the rule on **education** of children with disabilities in integrated settings.

34. This outcome may be explained by the existence of legislation on compulsory education for all, because, at the same time, many countries responded that they had made no specific provisions to make education accessible for children with disabilities. **Thus the real gap in the area of education lies between availability and accessibility**. It is worth noting that in 13 of the countries surveyed education is neither accessible nor available to children with disabilities.

35. Furthermore, 37 countries indicated that they had also not made education available to women with disabilities or to disabled members of minority groups.

36. Education is vital in the process of social integration of children into society. It is through education that individuals gain the necessary skills and qualifications that will eventually provide them with employment opportunities that will empower them to live independent lives and allow full participation. The denial of the right to education in integrated settings to children and adults with disabilities is a serious violation of their human rights and needs to be addressed urgently by international, regional and national human rights stakeholders, including United Nations bodies concerned with education.

37. The survey inquired about the existence of learning materials in accessible formats and sign language interpretation in schools and other educational settings. Responses revealed that in 30 of the 114 countries there was no sign language instruction for deaf children and in 23 there were no materials in Braille. In 45 there are no materials or methodologies for teaching children with intellectual disabilities.

38. The lack of equal opportunity in education for all persons with disabilities is reflected in the situation of persons with disabilities on the labour market. Not only are they underrepresented, but their chances for promotion and upgrading of skills are far lower than those of non-disabled persons.

39. Findings also showed that for the most part neither Governments nor society at large had recognized the **rights of persons with disabilities to employment**.

Although many countries stated that they had established quotas for employing persons with disabilities, nearly the same number (two thirds) responded that the quotas had not been filled.

40. Considering that gainful employment and a productive life greatly enhance the sense of dignity for all persons and contribute to psychological well-being and social integration, changing the attitudes of Governments and employers towards employment of persons with disabilities and raising awareness regarding the abilities, potential and contributions of persons with disabilities should be given high priority. Otherwise persons with disabilities will remain invisible and economically marginalized, having for the most part a lower standard of living than their counterparts.

41. Throughout the Standard Rules, the need for **involvement of persons with disabilities and their organizations** in all the issues pertaining to their rights is stressed repeatedly. It was therefore important to include in the survey a question regarding the involvement of persons with disabilities and their organizations on every rule starting from awareness-raising to international cooperation. The survey also examined the involvement of persons with disabilities under each of the measures listed in the Standard Rules.

42. Rule 18, regarding organizations of persons with disabilities, is perhaps the one that fully demonstrates the participatory nature of the work needed to achieve equalization of opportunities. It is, however, also useful to look at the involvement of persons with disabilities in measures pertaining to other rules.

43. On awareness-raising, 86 countries out of 114 do involve organizations of persons with disabilities in awareness-raising work — an impressive result, leaving only 28 of the responding countries where disabled persons' organizations are not involved in raising awareness.

44. On **medical care, rehabilitation** and **support services**, 44, 51 and 43 countries respectively reported that they did not involve or consult disabled persons' organizations; while on **accessibility** 52 countries do not consult with such organizations; 47 countries do not consult them on **education**; and 57 neither involve them nor consult with them on **employment**.

45. The numbers do not differ much on other rules, which is accurately reflected in the responses received to rule 18, where 47 countries responded that disabled persons' organizations had no legal or representational status; 47 had not allocated any financial resources to their activities; and 58, 59 and 58 respectively had neither adopted policies, nor passed legislation nor attempted in any way to strengthen and support such organizations.

46. I believe these figures speak for themselves and assist us in explaining the failure to achieve the goal of equalization of opportunities.

47. Finally, and before moving on to the second part of this report on the activities of the past year, I would like to touch on the subject of international cooperation exemplified in rule 21 under **technical and economic cooperation**.

48. Findings indicate that, despite the number of countries (79) that, according to the survey results, are signatory to international cooperation agreements, those commitments have not been translated into active exchange of technical expertise,

experience and best practices, nor have they resulted in a wide dissemination of technology and joint projects.

49. Furthermore, it seems that even with the existence of a declared commitment to international cooperation, this does not extend to providing services in those countries to persons with disabilities from minority groups such as immigrants and refugees.

IV. Activities of the Special Rapporteur

A. Advocacy

50. The past year also saw the continuation of the efforts to build the capacity of Arab parliamentarians and legislators that began in late 2004 with the adoption of the Arab Decade for Persons with Disabilities. The purpose of this initiative is to review and strengthen disability legislation in the Arab world. In February 2006, a formal committee on disability was established within the Federation of Arab Parliaments as a result of advocacy efforts I conducted.

51. The committee's activities include sharing of information and expertise, in particular on legislation and mainstreaming activities pertaining to persons with disabilities in Arab countries. In September 2006, an agreement was reached with the President of the Federation, also the Speaker of the Jordanian House of Representatives (who is also the Head of the Committee on Disability and a Jordanian Member of Parliament), to hold upcoming symposia under the auspices of the Federation. This in itself will serve to mainstream the issue of disability legislation across the board in all Arab parliaments and councils.

52. Discussions initiated in 2005 with both the Government of Finland and the World Federation of the Deaf have resulted in a joint project aimed at strengthening sign language awareness and education for deaf children and adults in the Arab world. A needs assessment was conducted in four countries (Jordan, Lebanon, Qatar, and the Syrian Arab Republic), which would be the pilot countries for the project. The results of the assessment were presented to the panel of experts and the World Federation of the Deaf in January. The project will be expanded to other countries in a year's time.

53. In 2004, with the adoption of the Arab Decade, the office of the Special Rapporteur commissioned three 30-second television spots to raise awareness about the rights of persons with disabilities. From January 2006 to December 2007, an additional six bilingual (Arabic-English) public awareness television spots portraying children, youth and adults with disabilities in a positive way and highlighting their strengths, abilities, talents and creativity will be produced. Three of these started airing free of charge on satellite television stations in November 2006.

54. In March 2006, I presented a statement to the Commission on the Status of Women on the occasion of International Women's Day. I regard the issue of women with disabilities as a priority area in my work and I have advocated that the United Nations and other development stakeholders, as well as non-governmental organizations dealing with women's issues, pay particular attention to girls and

women with disabilities, who constitute a fairly marginalized group in many conservative countries as well as in the women's movement in general.

55. Also in the same vein, I made a speech in Cairo in May 2006 at the regional meeting on women with disabilities, advocating for the rights of women with disabilities in the Arab world — a part of the world that is only beginning to pay attention to the needs of women with disabilities.

56. I sent a written statement to the second meeting of the Human Rights Council regarding the adoption of the convention on the rights of persons with disabilities, recommending that the rights of the persons with disabilities should be considered on an equal basis with all other rights under the Council's jurisdiction.

57. In relation to raising awareness of the Standard Rules, I attended a meeting of the World Health Organization in Cairo in March 2006 at which participants examined the responses of the global survey under rules 2, 3, 4 and 19 of the Standard Rules (medical care, rehabilitation, support services and personnel training). The meeting focused on the challenges relating to the provisions of those services and on ways of overcoming them. My intervention focused on the need to adopt a rights-based approach to service delivery and on how to translate commitments into services at the local and community levels.

B. Monitoring: country visits

58. The past year also saw two country visits, first to South Africa and later to China. The programmes of the visits were both intensive and highly rewarding. Meetings in both countries took place with government officials, including Prime Ministers, Vice Premiers, ministers of social affairs, education, health, finance and sports, representatives of United Nations bodies and of organizations of persons with disabilities. In South Africa the visits also included the Human Rights Commission and included visits to schools and higher education institutions in which persons with disabilities receive their education in integrated settings, to employment and training agencies and to institutes at which persons with disabilities are empowered and enabled to explore and use their talents and creativity, such as art and dance schools.

59. **South Africa** is a country where the concept and philosophy of equalization of opportunities for persons with disabilities have been developed into specific policies and programmes. Disability issues also have a prominent place in the Office of the President. Persons with disabilities in South Africa have been the beneficiaries of the great transformation in the country. The impressive change from an apartheid regime to a multiracial, multicultural and pluralistic system has brought persons with disabilities, along with other marginalized groups, to the forefront of social activism and nation-building.

60. The Government of South Africa has adopted a quota system of 2 per cent employment for persons with disabilities in the public sector. However, the long history of apartheid, which deprived the black majority of access to quality education, among other basic rights, has resulted in fewer than the desired number of qualified persons with disabilities: the rate of employment at present stands at 1 per cent. Employment training and upgrading of skills are some of the efforts used to improve qualifications of persons with disabilities for public sector jobs.

61. In rural areas 60 per cent of persons with disabilities are employed, although the great majority are in sheltered workshops and their incomes are no more than the minimum wage. Training is provided in shelters to help persons with disabilities to find jobs on the open labour market. There are also programmes of collaboration with the private sector to employ those trained at the sheltered workshops, in particular in the manufacturing industry.

62. Policies and legislation aimed at equalization cover all aspects of life for persons with disabilities, but at every meeting attended at all levels of government the harsh legacy of apartheid, which left large segments of the population underdeveloped, was cited as the reason for the shortfall in implementation. The deficit is even more pronounced in rural areas where poverty prevails and communities are not equipped to meet the needs of persons with disabilities.

63. In the area of education, the Government has a policy of full integration of children with disabilities into the school system, but implementation is still in the early stages. However, Education for All initiatives in combination with the goals of the Education Flagship[4] have been integrated into the policies of the Ministry of Education.

64. Apart from children with disabilities, there are many groups of children with special needs in South Africa, including AIDS orphans and children with HIV/AIDS. This has placed an additional burden on government resources.

65. Assistive technology and devices are locally produced and used in South Africa and considerable resources are devoted to research and development in this area. Additionally, South Africa is implementing distance, web-based education directed at persons with disabilities in non-urban centres.

66. In short, the spirit of equalization can be seen clearly in all social policies and programmes that are being implemented in South Africa to achieve social justice. Particularly impressive is the number of disabled representatives in Parliament, who through their presence and commitment carry the issues of persons with disabilities from intention to implementation through the legislative process.

67. Others countries in Africa can learn a great deal from the South African experience, where, even in the absence of sufficient financial resources, there is an understanding at all levels that equalization is not a luxury to be dealt with only when surplus funds can be secured. This is perhaps one of the important lessons that South Africa can give the world.

68. South Africa is ideally placed to help African countries in the development, use and implementation of technology for persons with disabilities. The country could also serve as an example of what government commitment to equalization can result in despite the lack of sufficient financial resources.

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[4] The Education Flagship aims:

(a) To have the full participation of persons with disabilities and families in the design of all Flagship activities;

(b) To promote the full participation of persons with disabilities and families in the development of policies and guidelines related to the education of persons with disabilities at the local, national, regional and global levels;

(c) To seek to ensure that all governmental entities, donors and non-governmental organizations endorse the universal right to education for all children, youth and adults with a disability.

69. The other country visited in the past year was **China**, a country that has put a great deal of resources, both financial and human, behind the implementation of the Standard Rules. From the Vice-Chairman of the People's Republic of China, who is also the head of the Working Committee on Disability,[5] down to service providers at the community level, there is a firm grasp and deep knowledge of the Standard Rules and what it entails to implement its provisions.

70. The move away from the charitable approach to disability began when China adopted the Standard Rules. However, despite the progress made in meeting the needs in that area, China faces great challenges, chief among them the vastness of the country; the prevalence of disability in remote rural areas where it is not always easy to deliver services; and the fact that the number of persons with disabilities is almost 60 million persons. Nonetheless, the Government and the China Disabled Persons' Federation[6] exhibit great awareness regarding the need not to allow the country's transition from a planned to a free market economy marginalize and overlook the needs of the vulnerable groups in society, including persons with disabilities.

71. In terms of the country's vastness, large population and dual economies as a developed and developing/rural and industrialized country, China can serve as a model for good practices and creative ways of overcoming challenges.

72. Medical care and rehabilitation services are abundantly available, accessible and highly efficient in both Beijing and Shanghai, both densely populated urban centres. Rehabilitation services are delivered through community-based health centres at the county, district, community and neighbourhood levels and involve the families of persons with disabilities as well as persons with disabilities themselves.

73. The China Disabled Persons' Federation has adopted the goal of meeting the needs of the entire disabled population of China (60 million) by the year 2025. The Federation is negotiating with all levels and departments of government in order to secure a commitment to that goal and the necessary funding to reach it.

74. Employment for persons with disabilities has been taken out of sheltered workshops onto the open labour market. Special employment agencies have been established that assist persons with disabilities in identifying their skills and capabilities. The agencies also facilitate contacts with prospective employers from the private sector.

75. Further, national legislation is being reviewed in order to better accommodate the concept of equalization of opportunities for persons with disabilities.

76. Education for persons with disabilities is a priority for the Government of China and the commitment to integration of persons with disabilities has extended to the level of higher education. Additionally, persons with disabilities are encouraged to develop their artistic talents and to get involved in extracurricular activities. Sports are considered an important part of the lives of persons with disabilities and the sports training villages[7] are integrated and fully accessible.

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[5] A government-appointed committee with representation from the highest levels of government to oversee the implementation of the Standard Rules in a systematic and methodical manner.

[6] More information can be found at http://www.cdpf.org.cn/english/.

[7] Residential sports training facilities in which athletes with disabilities and non-disabled athletes live and train together in integrated settings.

77. However, with regard to accessibility of the physical environment, especially to the urban built environment, much work remains to be done. Though China has legal provisions on accessibility, these mainly concern new construction and less already existing infrastructure. Rural environments, on the other hand, are highly inaccessible and the China Disabled Persons' Federation has made this area one of its priorities.

V. Recommendations

78. **The global survey has an information gap with respect to the implementation of the Standard Rules in the 77 countries that did not respond to the questionnaire. I will therefore continue my work with the survey. I also urge individual States to review their responses and to further develop their implementation activities in areas of concern. For organizations of persons with disabilities, the survey can be used as a springboard in their advocacy work with Governments. I would like to make the following recommendations:**

(a) **The first step to implementing the measures identified by the Standard Rules is to adopt policies and to pass legislation. Although a number of States have done so, it is important for legal provisions to be developed into relevant and appropriate programmes that aim to equalize opportunities for persons with disabilities;**

(b) **Governments should allocate financial resources to such programmes and should acknowledge that equalization of opportunities is a right for persons with disabilities and not a privilege that Governments can choose to implement only when there is a surplus of funds;**

(c) **Awareness-raising constitutes the cornerstone and foundation of equalization of opportunities: Governments need to intensify their efforts in this area with regard to the rights of persons with disabilities;**

(d) **Also in the area of awareness-raising, States are urged to use the most powerful tool at their disposal, the media, in order to change attitudes and behaviours and to portray persons with disabilities as capable, contributing members of society;**

(e) **States should approach medical care, rehabilitation and assistive services in a holistic manner and ensure that those services are available to persons with disabilities in a way that enables full participation and equality for persons with disabilities to live independent lives in which their rights and dignity are safeguarded;**

(f) **In the area of accessibility, States should treat all forms of accessibility with the same importance and recognize the diversity of persons with disabilities, be it in the area of the built environment, transportation, information or communication;**

(g) **In terms of education and employment, Governments are urged to apply the concept of accessibility and equality and to use integrated education and employment systems and services. Governments further need to recognize and promote the capabilities and contributions of persons with disabilities;**

(h) With regard to organizations of persons with disabilities, Governments shall offer all support, both financial and technical, to organizations in their countries. Not only are they important in offering Governments their expertise in terms of the services and programmes needed, but they are also part of the important support system that persons with disabilities need in their local communities and neighbourhoods. Governments are therefore urged to build stronger partnerships with organizations of persons with disabilities;

(i) All Governments should increase their regional and international cooperation in the area of disability by exchanging and sharing information and expertise, offering technical and technological assistance and encouraging collaborative efforts to find solutions to implementation of programmes. In short, Governments should exercise true international responsibility in the area of protecting and promoting the rights of persons with disabilities;

(j) Finally, I call upon all Governments to intensify their commitment to the rights of persons with disabilities through the signing and ratification of the convention on the rights of persons with disabilities, and to ensure that their commitment at the international level is mirrored by actions at the national level.

79. Last year, I carried out an intensive campaign to include disability in the review process of the Millennium Development Goals at the 2005 World Summit. In that connection I met with the President of the General Assembly at that time and with over 40 ambassadors. I also sent letters to over 150 Heads of State and ministers urging them to include the issue of persons with disabilities in their statements to the Assembly. I am greatly disappointed that less than a handful of countries responded.

80. I will not, however, give in to disappointment and I again urge the Members of the Commission to help me in elevating the issues of disability to the level where they need to be — at the top of the rights and development priorities of all countries.